

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 19, 1966

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
Mr. Bell
Mr. Marks
Admiral Raborn

NSC
REVIEW
COMPLETE
D, 6/26/2003

Attached is my Saigon report. I am also sending copies to the other addressees below.

It represents my own, still tentative, views as to the core elements of a more effective non-military program. I would be grateful for any reactions you have, and will hope to touch base with each of you personally soon.

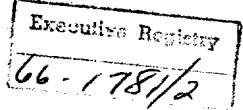
R. W. Komer

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April 19, 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Komer Report on Saigon Trip

This more detailed report is confined to my main business -- backing up our non-military effort in Vietnam. It touches on the military and political situations only as they bear on the civil reconstruction effort -- which is often. While I still regard myself as a "new boy" on Vietnam, and my conclusions as necessarily tentative, I stand fully behind them at this point.

I. General Conclusions

While our splendid military effort is going quite well, our civil programs lag behind -- for understandable reasons.

The Mission in Saigon is beginning to bring more order and focus to the civil side and we can do a lot better, if we concentrate on first things first.

To achieve the necessary results, we must ourselves give higher priority to (and expand) certain key pacification programs, especially Cadres and police -- if necessary at some expense to the military effort.

Two critical dangers can lead to undermining our whole civil and indeed military effort -- inflation and continuing political crisis which is sapping an already feeble GVN.

There is one major difference between our military and civil programs. The former is largely self-contained; it brings its own logistic tail and local security with it, for example. The latter must necessarily operate mostly through a feeble GVN. The sheer weakness of the GVN is the greatest bottleneck of all. Yet feeble though it is, strengthening it as the preferable alternative to the VC is the purpose of the exercise. We must try to build up a stable, progressive GVN, rather than (as some suggest in their frustration) largely taking over the civil as well as military role in Vietnam. Efficient as this might be, it would probably be self-defeating. So we must on the one hand accept the constraints of working through the GVN, while on the other seeking to increase its effectiveness and our own

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SECRET

2

leverage on it. Porter quite agrees, and we will study ways and means of using package "self help" approaches despite the risks and frustrations involved.

More can probably be done in this category -- through a combination of discreetly applied persuasion, inducements, and if need be pressures. Surely the fact of our rapidly growing investment in Vietnam should give us some greater influence, even though it makes us more the GVN's prisoners at the same time.

We must also guard against trying to do too much too soon, lest we not do anything well. Concentrating rather than unduly dispersing our effort in the initial phases (and then expanding) is the key. The answer here is to sort out our priorities on the civil side, and create the basic building blocks before erecting too much superstructure. We can spur a socio-economic revolution in a non-country even during wartime, but it won't be easy at best. It may be well nigh impossible unless we focus our efforts and phase them properly. If we can't pacify the countryside and control inflation, all our other ambitious enterprises may go for naught.

Another reason for cutting our suit to fit the cloth is that of not overloading the GVN. Moreover, the present regime, if indeed it lasts, will be caught up in the assembly elections and constitution-drafting. So there is a powerful case for getting at least the minimum essential RD and anti-inflation decisions out of the GVN before it again becomes utterly preoccupied with politics.

All in all, Porter and I believe that we need urgently a phased overall plan, with a set of meaningful priorities, for the civil side. We see roughly two phases -- first that of pacification and reconstruction and later a development phase -- though the two can overlap in some areas. But some programs, however desirable for the longer term, must be postponed if necessary should they compete unduly with first phase priorities. Porter and I are working on a directive (perhaps to be issued as a NSAM) for discussion in Washington and Saigon (at Tab is our first joint draft). Certain key components of the first phase are discussed below.

II. Pacification (Revolutionary Development). Key aspects of this problem deserve highest priority -- and greater emphasis. Unless we and the GVN can secure and hold the countryside cleared by military

SECRET

SECRET

3

operations, we either face an ever larger and quasi-permanent military commitment or risk letting the VC infiltrate again.

A whole melange of forces, organizations and activities have been engaged in local defense, local security, and getting the countryside functioning -- Popular Forces, Auto-Defense, Cadres (PATs), police, etc. There is a strong case for rationalizing this structure by building up the two most promising elements -- the cadres and the police, while gradually phasing out the others. Some phase-out would probably be essential in any case because of the increasing manpower shortage (see below).

A. Cadre Expansion. While the RD program has some questionable aspects, it seems the most promising approach yet developed. The RD ministry led by Gen. Thang is better than most, and the Vung Tau and Montagnard training centers are producing 5500 trained men for insertion in 59-man teams into 93 villages every fifteen weeks. Others besides myself who visited Vung Tau were also quite impressed.

But Porter sees even this rate as insufficient to keep up with "the growing military capability to sweep the VC out of key areas." He urges rapid expansion via building another training center (which he'd like to get Seabees to build). The aim is roughly to double cadre output from 19,000 to 39,000 trained personnel per year. He thinks this rate could be reached by end CY 1966. I agree with Porter and will press this concept at the Washington end.

There is some question as to whether the chief instructor at Vung Tau (Capt. Mai) may be attempting to indoctrinate the cadres for sectarian political purposes. Porter has investigated and is satisfied that this is controllable.

B. The National Police. We are building toward a 72,000 man goal by 1967. A promising new concept is the Police Field Forces (PFF), which are expected to reach 15,000 of the total. These latter fill the gap between US/ARVN operations and the return of normal conditions. Lightly armed and ground mobile, they assure local security in the village complex after ARVN moves out, by aggressive patrolling action. There is a case for expanding the PFF -- as well as other police activities -- as the chief permanent force to maintain local security in Vietnam. Some Vietnamese officials favor going to 130-150,000.

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4

C. Chieu Hoi (Defector Program). This is not strictly RD, but bears upon it. In any case, there are few programs which produce a higher rate of return for the piddling sums invested. The March total of returnees -- 3,366 -- was the highest yet. I'm most discouraged to hear that the GVN wants to cut this program back for budgetary reasons. Let's cut somewhere else if necessary. However, the US hasn't emphasized enough getting returnees (and refugees) integrated into civil life.

D. Land Reform. On this Honolulu program the GVN doesn't seem to be going anywhere fast. Porter regards land reform as primarily a matter of political timing. Covert resistance of the landlords is the key problem. Lodge will have to handle this directly with Ky, who has the legislation and the land available. This might help win votes at the right time.

E. Area Priorities. We and the GVN are committed to the four National Priority areas, even though some may not be those where greatest progress is feasible. As our effort expands, we ought to add other priority areas. By and large, I favor more attention to those areas where greatest progress is feasible, perhaps because of the competence of GVN province and district chiefs, degree of GVN control, etc. We should back success, and put our resources where they will be best used. By the same token we may want to withhold resources from those districts -- even in National Priority areas -- where because of corruption, incompetence, etc., they are not being well used.

I personally favor more attention to the Delta (IV Corps) region, which contains eight out of Vietnam's 15 million people and is its chief rice bowl.

F. Better Coordination of Civil and Military Planning. Clearly we must dovetail the military's sweep operations and civil pacification. My impression is that, since the military are moving ahead faster than the civil side, we need to beef up the latter to get it in phase. There's little point in the military clearing areas the civil side can't pacify. On the other hand, security is the key to pacification; people won't cooperate and the cadres can't function till an area is secure.

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5

The Mission believes that Lodge's weekly Mission Council meetings and Porter's weekly Liaison Group sessions will help provide the necessary coordination. Porter also has an able MACV colonel -- Hollis -- in his office for the purpose. Porter is now requiring MACV to come up with a coordinated military plan on who sweeps and who then shields while the Cadre teams are inserted.

But I suspect that MACV's forward planning has yet to be adequately complemented on the civil side. The Mission should begin developing a pacification plan to go along with each of MACV's campaign plans as soon as the latter planning cycle begins.

The situation is somewhat better with regard to resolving competing claims for resources. Here Lodge and Porter seem determined to rule between civil and military claimants. Here too, however, comparable forward planning is essential to afford a rational basis for choice. I will look further into this matter.

Somehow the civil side appears reluctant to call on military resources, which are frequently the best and most readily available. I put everyone politely on notice that I would have no such hesitations -- provided that the case was demonstrable -- and that this was at the express request of the Secretary of Defense.

III. Licking Inflation. This is fast becoming problem No. 1, and is already as critical as the RD effort. Nothing can more quickly undermine the already rickety GVN government structure and its popular acceptability than rampant inflation. The need is now widely understood (Lodge too is now focusing personally on it). Much thought has been given to anti-inflation measures in both Saigon and Washington, but not enough has actually been done as yet.

The relative feebleness of the GVN means that we may have to lower our sights on what measures we can expect it to take. This view is shared by the Mission (TOAID 6657). The GVN's performance to date on the Honolulu package is disappointing; any likely successor regime may be weaker yet. This suggests that: (1) while continuing to press for GVN action across-the-board, we should concentrate on the most realizable measures; (2) we should design if possible, a package of inducements and pressures to give us leverage on these; (3) we must necessarily also focus on what US steps are essential -- these at least are within our own power to do.

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SECRET

6

Coping with inflation cuts across just about every USG activity in Vietnam. It is as much a problem of managing military resources as civilian. We must mount a USG-wide attack on the problem, as one of our top priorities, and try to regain the momentum lost since Honolulu.

A. We must carefully screen the whole US military/civil construction program. Wehrle has calculated that the 1966 military building program (\$20 million a month -- to rise to \$40 million) is the same as a \$200 billion construction program in the US -- think of this inflationary impact on our economy. We should screen -- here and in Saigon -- both the whole program and each construction project; marginal projects may have to give, or special techniques (e. g. "turnkey" proposal for new Hue/Phubai airfield) used to minimize impact.

The same must be done on the civil side. For anti-inflationary as well as priority reasons, certain investment-type projects may have to be postponed until a later phase, when inflation is under control and the country more pacified.

B. Port Congestion. I spent much time at Saigon Port and talking with military and civilian port experts. Wehrle and others see clogged ports as the key inflationary bottleneck. We have plenty of supply programmed to meet the demand but we can't get it in and distributed. Our huge military buildup has saturated a previously inadequate port system. We must get the military out of the Saigon commercial port area as soon as feasible. This problem will ease somewhat as new port construction is completed, but will remain acute through at least mid-1967. RMK's New Port project for our military outside Saigon won't be completed till May 1967. So we need a whole series of interim remedies:

1. We may be forced to ask the US military to take over Saigon port. They're naturally much more efficient than AID, which has to work through the Vietnamese. Lodge is prepared to do so if necessary and to ask the GVN to authorize it on grounds of urgent national defense needs. But AID operations are improving, especially since Gen. Brakestone arrived. He's optimistic about several new expedients, and I saw visible improvement.

2. One bottleneck is the slowness of Vietnamese importers in picking up goods from the port area. A new GVN penalty and confiscation

SECRET

7

system just approved should help. Mann is also high on a big US-run (or equipped) trucking company, which would take stuff from the port and dump it on the importer's doorstep if necessary.

3. Westmoreland should be urged to keep giving high priority to military port work, even after his own logistic problems are eased (which will be sooner than on the civil side). Otherwise MACV might be tempted to shift priorities.

4. Shipping space priorities also need review. Why should all military cargo take precedence over civil? We now have a MACV/USAID shipping group, but this problem needs to be attacked at the Washington end too.

5. Since Saigon is the worst problem, we should make a maximum effort to ship directly to other ports. I queried Gen. Brakastone on the 2,000 tons per day USAID has coming in and then being shipped out; he said more could be done but that much of this was for the IV Corps delta area, which had no port of its own. Query - could Vung Tao be used?

C. Deflationary Fiscal Measures. We probably have to shift strategy and accept some greater degree of inflation. The Honolulu program is probably too ambitious for a feeble GVN, e.g. it's hard to force increased taxation from a non-government. Wehrle says we'll have to settle for restraint; not stabilization. Nonetheless we must keep trying hard.

1. The Fowler proposals to sop up piasters are worth a good college try, despite their political unpalatability here. We ought to see how far the IMF can get.

2. Devaluation will probably be necessary, in Wehrle's view by summer. He strongly favors a wage increase first, to help keep the poor civil servants from stocking arms. Devaluation thereafter will perpetrate a cruel deception, so at least a few months should intervene.

3. Allowing selective price increases on non-essentials is probably inevitable, if we are to hold the line on essentials.

D. The Rice Problem. Rice is the key staple, and central to controlling the cost of living. It doesn't make sense to buy it for dollars in the US or elsewhere and ship it in, if we can reduce this need by liberating more rice in Vietnam itself, especially in the rice-rich Delta. Another major advantage is that we would deny this rice to the VC.

SECRET

8

First, the GVN needs to control the flow of rice more effectively. Porter has some imaginative ideas on how to do so via providing and controlling the bags in which the rice is moved.

Second, we may want to give even higher priority in key cases to military operations protecting the rice harvest. I was greatly impressed with the results of the recent 101st Airborne rice collecting operation in the Tuy Hoa area, which got around 40,000 tons compared to 9,000 last year (if I recall correctly). Rice is a key VC target, so these operations are militarily justified as well.

Third, Porter is considering setting up rice buying centers to give the peasant a decent price, and thus an incentive to fight the VC for his rice.

E. In sum, we urgently need a revised action program of both US and GVN measures to lick inflation before it licks us. All here in Washington must focus on this. We also need a detailed negotiating strategy, including pressures and inducements, to get the GVN signed on.

IV. Manpower Rationalization. The drain of years of war, VC recruiting and the growth of GVN and US activities is fast creating an acute shortage of usable Vietnamese manpower. This has reached such proportions that every sizeable new manpower demand must be largely at the expense of some existing activity. Twice while I was in Saigon, for example, MACV questioned expansion of civil programs because they would compete with the planned military expansion.

Contributing to this problem is the proliferation of GVN activities. There is a bewildering variety of military, intelligence, and civil organizations -- all using up bodies. Misuse of the draft is still a scandal. One urgent need -- to which Westmoreland fully agrees -- is a rationalization of manpower study, perhaps done jointly by the US and GVN. Consolidation of various military arms, with consequent reduction of overlapping headquarters, may be indicated. As Gen. Krulak told me, this little country has an incredibly complex chain of command. A caution, however -- many outfits are personal fiefdoms of Directorate members and other political personalities.

Porter regards the Popular Forces -- about 130,000 strong -- as the last remaining big manpower reservoir. Arguing that the Cadres largely

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SECRET

9

overlap their local defense function, he favors robbing the PF for Cadre recruits. I gather MACV has yet to be convinced.

Query -- are returnees and refugees being tapped adequately?

V. An-Giang Development Showcase. An-Giang in the Delta is probably the most completely pacified of the 43 provinces -- a stronghold of the Hoa Hao sect. Gen. Thang has already allocated it for 1966 an RD budget of 100 million piasters, double that of any other province. Porter wants to superimpose on this a larger development program now being discussed in the Mission. This may be a very useful showcase; Porter and I will pursue it at our respective ends.

VI. Reporting System on the Civil Side. Secretary McNamara stressed before I left the importance of a firmer and more systematic fix on what is really happening on the civil side. What areas do we really control? I hit this hard. Porter was already moving on this problem, and is convinced of the need. The new system of province reporting -- direct to Porter -- will help greatly. He and I also agreed to examine ways and means of getting better statistics, more systematic reporting and reliable indices of progress on the civil side -- Saigon 4051 is one result. Porter has the action, and I'll keep needling him.

VII. Personnel Matters

It is no secret that we have urgent civil side problems of recruiting, replacement, working conditions and morale, which have significant impact on our ability to carry out effective programs. Lodge, Porter and I are struck by the relative inflexibility of normal USG civilian agency procedures when applied to Vietnam. The Mission needs better backstopping on this, and I propose to help. Clearly we must treat Vietnam as a special wartime situation and evolve special procedures which will meet its unique needs. In general, our first need is to attract and retain top people. Second, and related, is to keep high morale in the field.

A. The Talent Drain. This is perhaps the most serious. I'm told we have a better top team in Saigon now than ever before. It certainly seemed impressive to me. But all the key people except Porter and Mann -- to wit Wehrle, Habib, Wilson, Zorthian, Condon, Jorgenson -- are leaving in the next several months.

These are dedicated men, and many of them would extend were it not for the difficult family and leave arrangements, which are doubly

SECRET

10

onerous because of the pressure conditions under which these men live and work. Moreover, an unconscionable amount of the time of top people is spent arranging how to get to Bangkok or Hong Kong to see wives, etc.

B. Getting Better People for the Provinces. Lodge wanted me to tell you that he is organizing the civil side to keep programs going in the provinces regardless of top level changes in the GVN. To this end we need more direct contact with the provinces to get a better line on the RD effort, and probably more US people there. Lodge also thinks the quality of our province reps (especially AID) is low; he says only 20% are any good; Porter (who knows) says it's more like 50%. Since top notch province people are essential to success of our expanding RD effort, this is a top priority for special recruitment. The Mission favors seconding able young FSOs and field officers (Major - Lt. Col.). With 7-9,000 men rotating home monthly from Vietnam, we ought to be able to screen out a few talented, dedicated people who'd be willing to stay. Mann is charged by Porter to set up a screening procedure.

C. Visitor Burden. The burden on a wartime theater is grossly excessive -- 1400 VIPs and 3700 senior officials in 1965. The curve is up for 1966. Another aspect is that the cost per visitor is an estimated \$4,000 without counting security protection.

Everybody recognizes the problem, but not enough is being done about it. Lodge and Porter understand the political importance of Congressmen, Governors, and certain other VIPs, but say can't we cut back the entourages and the lesser officials. They can read the cables. We need a real screening system, or rather one for the military and one for the civil side.

D. Understaffing and Replacements. While in general we should be chary of too many Americans in Vietnam (4,700 non-military there already), enriching the civil side would be a drop in the bucket. Mann says AID is understaffed, especially in the Controller's office and CIP branch -- both important. We also need a more systematic long-term replacement scheme.

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SECRET

11

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS.

As a result of my Saigon visit, Porter and I intend to focus on the following as matters of urgency, -- in close liaison with Washington agencies and our mission in Saigon:

- A. Develop an overall non-military plan of action, with proper phasing and realistic priorities, to complement our forward military planning and buildup.
- B. Give effective top priority to expansion of key pacification-type programs -- RD cadres, perhaps police, etc. -- adding or diverting resources from other programs including the military where needed.
- C. Develop and put into effect soonest a revised anti-inflation package, including control of US resources as well as GVN stabilization measures.
- D. In this connection, pay special attention to port congestion, now a key bottleneck on the civil more than the military side.
- E. Work out ways to coordinate our civil and military programs more effectively, and in which our military can help the civil side.
- F. Work on rationalizing the use of GVN manpower, first in terms of a US set of priorities and then of selling this to the GVN
- G. Develop more effective leverage on the GVN to get it to do the necessary.
- H. Get a handle on the top level civilian talent drain in Vietnam and help develop more effective personnel and replacement procedures for this unique wartime situation.
- I. Firm up the necessary data base and progress report system to give a better picture of what's really going on in the non-military sphere.

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Civil Reconstruction in Viet-Nam.

1. From the time of the Honolulu Declaration it has been our national policy to give emphasis to civil reconstruction comparable to that given military operations. Indeed, the two must go hand in hand, for there is little lasting value in defeating VC main force and sweeping rural areas if the VC move back in again after military operations are completed.
2. So first principle must be to carry out a concept whereby civil reconstruction keeps pace with those military operations which clear areas and, more importantly, the government commits itself to permanent defense of population within cleared area. In some cases, when large-scale military operations unnecessary, civil reconstruction may be first priority.
3. Second principle must be to carry out rural reconstruction -- indeed all military and non-military programs in Viet-Nam -- in manner which minimizes growing inflationary risk to a fragile Vietnamese economy. Rampant inflation can destroy social fabric of country as readily as VC insurgency, and would create climate in which loss of confidence in GVN would powerfully assist VC.
4. Third principle must be not to overload fragile GVN with more than it can do with reasonable efficiency. Major deference between military and non-military programs in Viet-Nam is that latter must be carried out primarily through GVN. But GVN is a feeble instrument already stretched thin -- competition for manpower between different programs, especially between military and civil programs already intense.
5. All three of above principles clearly suggest a fourth; we must avoid like the plague proliferation of programs which will (A) compete unduly with primary short-term objective of rural construction; (B) add unduly to inflationary pressures; (C) stretch GVN resources too thin. Otherwise we will be defeating our own primary purposes. In practical terms this means we must have a clear sense of priorities! Repeat a clear sense of priorities! The number of things we can and should do to achieve a socio-economic revolution in SVN is endless, but in order to lay the indispensable foundations we must do first things first. Repeat we must do first things first. Some programs, however desirable in the longer term,

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2

must be postponed if necessary and fitted into a scheme of priorities whereby they will complement and build on the pacification programs rather than compete with them.

6. One can distinguish perhaps two phases of effort lasting over several years, and both going on simultaneously in various areas:

A. Reconstruction Phase.

Restoring normal conditions, getting civil economy going again.

B. Development Phase.

It is recognized that each phase may start at different times in different parts of Viet-Nam, and that there is considerable overlap between phases. This precludes a too rigid deferentiation between first and second phase activities during actual implementation of civil reconstruction programs. Example would be construction of secondary school in secure district town in order complement lower level school construction in outlying areas.

7. In practice this will mean postponing certain otherwise desirable activities, while (and this is critical) expanding certain other programs which are critical to successful completion of the first phase.

A. Priority programs in reconstruction phase.

- 1 Revolutionary Development Cadre.
 - 2) Administrative improvement of village/hamlet structure.
 - 3) Police backup - police field forces.
 - 4) Land reform.
 - 5) Rural economic assistance activities.
 - A) Hamlet school program
 - B) Rural health
 - C) Agricultural programs - Fertilizer, Seeds and Insecticides
 - D) Self-help
 - E) Repair of roads and bridges
 - 6) Refugee Assistance.
 - 7) Chieu Hoi.
 - 8) Psywar operations.
- (Last three activities - 6, 7, and 8 - also ongoing during military destruction phase.)

B. Priority programs in development phase.

- 1) Continuation first-phase activities.

SECRET

SECRET

3

- 2) Rural electrification.
- 3) Accelerated agricultural programs (see Freeman report).
- 4) Irrigation (E. G., Dredges).
- 5) Industrial development.
- 6) Water supply (E. G. Drilling Rigs).
- 7) Permanent road and bridge infrastructure.
- 8) Expanded and improved credit facilities.
- 9) Technical and secondary education facilities.
- 10) Increase police forces.
- 11) Increase training and recruitment of civil servants and technical personnel.
- 12) Expand public facilities and plant (E. G., Postal, Telephone, Telegraphic).

C. Practical steps to carry out above plan.

- 1) Expand number of RD group
- 2) Increase police support
- 3) Lick port congestion
- 4) Other anti-inflationary moves
- 5) Rationalization of manpower use
- 6) Expand Chieu Hoi and refugee programs
- 7) Agriculture and land reform

D. Relationship of above plan to US Military Program

Better designed to complement military effort. Reserves some civil programs for later when military construction tapers off (making civil programs less inflationary) and when more military resources become available for civil tasks. Must work out priorities between civil and military programs, and resources asked of military for civil purposes.

E. Relationship of above plan to political situation.

While plan necessarily assumes reasonable degree political stability. It enhances political stability by better focusing of demands on GVN resources and reducing inflationary impact. But if weaker government emerges, we have to trim our sails.

F. Relationship of above plan to US objectives in Honolulu declaration.

Above plan provides rational basis upon which Honolulu goals can be implemented. In short term, it may lead to postponement or curtailment of some activities agreed upon in Honolulu.

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